

## **Conservation and Restoration in times of War and Civil Strife**

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*Transcription of oral presentation*

Introduction First, on behalf of the World Monuments Fund I would like to thank the organizers of this conference for the honor of offering some concluding remarks. I would also like to complement the organizers of the conference in general. The plenary/breakout session format addressing various key themes has proved most efficient in allowing everyone's voice to be heard. I am sure we all agree that a wealth of additional ideas on heritage protection has been generated in these two days, based on the experiences and ideas of heritage site managers, curators, law enforcement officials, and others on the West Coast. It is amazing to think of how much progress has been made in the last 10 months or so in providing even better protection for America's historic places and their collections. As was said several times throughout the conference, those of us in the heritage management business have always been thinking about protection of buildings, sites and collections. That is what being a curator and a good preservationist is all about. But in the aftermath of September 11, the issues of protection have taken on all together new meanings and new proportions. The evidence of this is in all forms, as for example in:

The hundreds of articles that have appeared which relate to the subject to a plethora of conferences like this with the aim of generating new ideas and sharing best practices dealing with everything from revisions in building codes, to the introduction of all kinds of high-tech security measures.

As important as anything else is how since 9/11 the people of this nation have worked together to address improved security on all fronts. We heard several times how not only have inter-government relations changed, but that government's relations to the public has become much closer. This can only be described as a good thing. Indeed we have come a long way in the past 11 months, though we have a long way yet to go.

The main task given to me today is to try to put our post-9/11 dilemmas as historic site and collections managers, and those providing security to these sites, into the larger context of cultural heritage conservation as it is viewed elsewhere in the world. I will do my best to address this awesomely large topic in just a few minutes.

There are thousands of heritage conservation efforts underway each day throughout the world, in what could be described as a global phenomenon of preserving the world's heritage "for the sake of preservation". Due to the fact that the physical situations and socio-economic contexts of each site are subtly changing at all times, trying to precisely portray the global architectural conservation movement and the overall field's many facets is futile. As my mentor Jim Fitch once said: "It's like yelling at the ocean."

At this point practically every government has placed heritage conservation high on its agenda and appears to be taking the subject more and more seriously with each passing year. The numbers of participants in the field – professionals in a wide number of disciplines, advocates, members of the building industry, and the users of historic sites – must number in the tens of millions and the pace is growing. Indeed an international *ethos* for heritage conservation is in formation, not unlike what we see in the nature conservation movement.

This explosion of growth in the heritage conservation industry is attributable to a number of things: geopolitical changes as we saw with the fall of the Iron Curtain, sustained economic development, developments in telecommunications, the availability of affordable travel to practically everywhere in the world, an increasing supply of trained professionals, technicians, educators, etc. All in all it seems to me that architectural preservationists, or ‘architectural conservationists’, if you will, have kept up rather well with the demands on them, in typical cause and effect fashion, all in a race against time.

**Risks** One way to begin to make sense of it all in the broadest terms is to analyze the man-built heritage in terms of site types and risk types. Documenting and categorizing historic places by type is fairly straightforward work, though as mentioned before, due to its ever-changing nature, it is never ending. Our National Register of Historic Places has brilliantly shown how this kind of survey and documentation work can be done.

While during this conference we have talked at length about all kinds of practical solutions to mitigating the risks of terrorism and vandalism and the like to historic sites and collections, what has barely been mentioned has been the question of *why* it is happening in the first place.

As we all know, the risks to cultural heritage can be placed under two main categories: *natural risks* and *man-made risks*. (It should be said here that the “Heritage at Risk” program within ICOMOS lists a third category of risks—risks caused by the *passage of time*, which makes the sorting of problem types even easier.)

In any case, the types of perils to cultural heritage such as buildings, sites and collections are essentially finite. Under natural risks there are, of course, the usual suspects: fire, storm, flooding, earthquakes etc. Under the category of man-made risks are also the well-known culprits of war, vandalism, insensitive planning, pollution and so on.

While the lists of threat types might be neatly organized into categories and sub-categories, new examples and variants are always coming to light...When setting up criteria for WMF’s *World Monuments Watch List of 100 Most Endangered Places* program, I was talking with a representative of the World Meteorological Bureau in Switzerland about mapping natural risks and he said: “You’ve left out one important natural risk to humans dwelling along waterfronts: tidal surge.” I said, “Of course,” and remembered that the World Monuments Fund was founded in 1965 in response this

specific type of threat which seriously damaged much of Venice in a terrible flood that year.

After a while it becomes kind of a game to find new risks to put on the list of perils to cultural heritage. Managers of the famous site of Greater Zimbabwe in Africa made a compelling case for a grant from WMF a few years ago asking for help in dealing with animals, aardvarks in particular, burrowing beneath and destabilizing stone wall foundations – another threat type we simply hadn't thought of.

What is not so finite as lists of specific threats are the *situations where combinations of threats are posed*, which, of course, are usually the case. E.g. where an earthquake starts fires, or, where a serious earthquake, or severe war damage is followed by an overreaction during clean-up operations, and salvageable buildings, which could be crucial to regeneration, are bulldozed.

Of the many risks attributable to man both the willful and the unintended destruction of buildings, sites and objects during civil conflict is by far the most destructive.

Of course, the purposeful damage of cultural objects, both immovable and movable, is not a new thing. Sadly, it seems the practice has been around for about as long as there have been things for man to destroy. I saw on the Learning Channel the other day a program on the demolition industry where the proud company owner of a demolition company in Detroit said he figured that the demolition business must be the 'world's second oldest profession'. If that's the case, repairing and maintaining buildings -- that is to say *preserving things* -- must be an even earlier human occupation!

Lessons from History Human history is replete with examples of willful destruction that are useful to know about in our business, and their study can be especially fruitful if one is searching for root causes of the problems, or, again, the all-important question of *Why?* Not surprisingly, history is full of examples of repair and reconstruction efforts too...which are reassuring to those of us in the field today. Examples are found in ancient Mesopotamia, the location of the world's first permanent settlements. A rather late example there involves the reconstruction of a palace in Babylon in 562 BC by King Nebuchadnezzar, years after it was destroyed in war. Archaeologists surmised from surviving inscriptions that the king's main motive for rebuilding was to legitimize *his* kingdom.

The monumental remains of ancient Egypt, as at Karnak and Luxor temples, show numerous examples of where successive rulers obliterated evidences of the authorship and accomplishments of their predecessors. The motive for this kind of action was usually an attempt at self-aggrandizement. In ancient Egypt one can see a good example of the organized destruction of monumental works that represented new beliefs. The monotheistic King Akenaten's new capital of Amarna was razed to the ground by his successors who wanted the old religious ways returned to the kingdom.

The Parthenon in Greece is another interesting example. The present one—long recognized as the single most famous architectural icon of Western Civilization—in fact replaced two previous temples built on the same site. Both of its predecessors were destroyed in wars. Interestingly, in the debate to build the Parthenon we know today, in justifying its extreme expense, Pericles argued against others who wanted to leave the ruins of its immediate predecessor as a ruin, memorializing the last Persian invasion.

Interesting too, is the fact that the present Parthenon existed almost completely intact until the early 16th century when it was a victim of war. The Ottoman Turks were using it as a powder magazine, when a Venetian mortar shell struck it, causing the collapse of the whole center part of the building. At this one site we have illustrated examples of 1) the destruction of the symbol of a culture by a foreign invader, 2) its rebuilding in an improved form in the 5th century as an act civic pride, and 3) its careful preservation for the next 2000 years until its nearly complete destruction through collateral war damage. Since then there have been several major restoration campaigns, including the recent heroic effort—here, too, largely motivated by national pride.

Later in antiquity there is Alexander the Great's approach to colonizing, or *hellenizing*, western Asia, through modern Afghanistan all the way to northern India. At least one aspect of the great general's approach to conquest could be of some relevance today. In most instances he went to pains to *not* destroy the places he conquered, believing that the way to the hearts of people is through recognizing their own culture.

Rome's legendary destruction of Carthage by leveling the place, and plowing salt into the soil to render the city 'dead forever', is actually an extreme example even for the ancient Romans. They, like the Greeks, by and large saw their conquests as civilizing actions where certain institutions and local life ways were accommodated, just so long as the indigenous populations cooperated. Look at how both dealt with Egypt, for instance.

In the late Middle Ages, there were the 'iconoclasts' who struck out against the depiction of certain kinds of Christian imagery in places of worship. The reason: differing interpretations of the Bible in the Eastern Orthodox Church.

There are the Crusades (the first international Holy Wars) – which were all about religious intolerance, xenophobia, holy quests, adventure, and the like. The Crusades, like most wars in history, proved to be about plunder, with the last Crusade resulting in the destruction and looting of Constantinople and the destruction of the 1,000 year old Byzantine Empire.

From the Renaissance through to the 17th century there are more examples of threats to places and cultures and their histories, with some of the most spectacular involving the conquest of foreign lands...e.g. the Spanish in America. The motives: land acquisition and trade, the spreading of a religion, and again, the pursuit of wealth.

The religious wars in France and England during the later part of this period proved especially devastating to historic religious buildings. The main cause: intolerance during times when the institutions of church and state were seen as inseparable.

In the French Revolution the aristocracy and the Catholic Church were, of course, specific targets of rebellious citizens desperate to free themselves of what they perceived as an oppressive social system. It is a curious irony that the world's first preservation bureaucracy grew out of this conflict. When private and religious properties were nationalized, it created the need for inventories. This led to the organized maintenance of these properties, and defined principles for restoration, many of which we recognize today.

The conflicts in that 20th century alone have exhibited the whole gamut of *motives for destruction* of significant cultural heritage known in times prior, and then some! especially with regard to the technical developments during World Wars I and II – where the concepts of ‘destructive power’ and ‘total war’ took on new meanings.

We have Adolph Hitler's destructive actions that continue to defy understanding to this day. . . . Motivated by anger over an attempted nationalist uprising in Warsaw he ordered both it and Gdansk be razed to the ground. And they were! The citizens of Warsaw saw it coming and prepared for the disaster by documenting the Old Town with drawings and photographs, and other measures. This action stands as a fine early example of preservation-minded disaster preparedness that served to both justify and implement Warsaw's famous post-war reconstruction efforts.

Hitler's ideas for Paris and St Petersburg further revealed his obvious insanity. At one point he planned to completely destroy Paris, thinking that its beauty would upstage the new capital of Germany. In his wrath at the citizens of St Petersburg for resistance to Nazi invasion, he planned to submerge the incomparably beautiful former capital of Russia under a lake!

Of course, shells get fired in many directions when such wars get underway. We must not forget the response of the Allies in the same conflict. Our actions included the total destruction of Monte Casino and Dresden, among other places. This destruction was thorough too, with cities like Berlin, Hiroshima and Tokyo being described afterwards as “oceans of rubble.” Such are the hazards of war in our time. The repairs to damage caused WW II is still going on—the Frauenkirche in Dresden, and the recently completed renovation of the Reichstag in Berlin being examples.

The break-up of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990's proved a number of important things with regards to cultural heritage protection. One is that the protection of historic monuments afforded by the Blue Shield provision of the Hague Convention can mean *nothing* if the combatants choose to see it that way.

There, it seems that documentation of damage to cultural property for restitution purposes is proving useless as well. Due to the virulence of the ethnic conflicts in Bosnia and later

in Kosovo, there is little hope of reconciliation among the warring parties at this time. [At a much smaller scale there are some promising reconstruction projects in Mostar such as the rebuilding of the Old Bridge by UNESCO, and neighborhood rebuilding efforts through a partnership of the Agha Khan Trust for Culture and the World Monuments Fund.]

This is just my own opinion here, but in hindsight, it seems that the international reaction to the destruction of the famous Ottoman bridge at Mostar in 1993, quite possibly served to inspire the even more widely publicized destruction in March 2001 of the two giant rock-cut Buddhas in Bamian, Afghanistan which shocked the world, and which we now know involved Al Qaeda in assistance to the Taliban. It remains to be seen how the destruction of the Bamian Buddhas may have related to the suicide bombings of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, but I can't help thinking that one inspired the other. The Post-September 11 Era As for the attacks on America a year ago next month. Well, we all witnessed these unbelievable events and stand in the midst of its very costly and disorienting aftermath. It was a real punch in the nose to a benevolent country minding its own business on one beautiful day in September.

In the January 12 issue of *The Economist* under a heading called "The Mood of America" is an article titled "What has September 11th really wrought?" A couple of points were stressed that have a bearing on our conference today:

1. Americans at this time have an extraordinary confidence in government, (which the writer goes on to tell us, will not last forever). Obviously, time is of the essence in responding to the recent disasters, and we shouldn't let up in adapting our new situation or we will lose the confidence and admiration of the public.
2. In the aftermath of the crisis the country is faced with an historic opportunity to "engage more with the rest of the world on a sustained basis."<sup>5</sup> This could be seen mostly as a foreign policy issue. But since the root of the recent conflict mostly has to do with cultural differences, the expertise in heritage conservation within the National Park Service and with others present could, and in my opinion should, be shared more so on an international basis. I say this with the firm belief that through such actions new understandings and better relations among people can certainly be achieved.

The governments of France, Japan and Germany are heavily involved with heritage conservation projects in other countries with aims of both improving relations, and foreign trade. France and Japan's projects throughout Southeast Asia offer stellar examples of where assistance in heritage conservation is an integral part of their foreign policies.

It seems to me that there is real promise here. If the experience of the World Monuments Fund in our work in over 70 countries at the moment is any indicator, it can be assumed that practically every other country in the world would be receptive to cooperative international heritage conservation efforts.

Just two weeks ago I and other colleagues and I were advancing work in the field at the heritage sites in Moscow and St Petersburg, and later site at of Nemrut Dag in Eastern Turkey (until recently a dangerous conflict-ridden area). In ten days time its on to Nepal, Tibet, and Mongolia doing essentially the same thing. In the midst of that mission is a stop in Beijing to continue work in restoration of the Emperor Qian Long's retirement lodge in the Forbidden City, where site administrators are *very* enthusiastic about international technical and financial assistance for better conserving China's vastly rich architectural heritage.

Close American heritage conservation practice is held in high esteem throughout the world, our having made some valuable contributions to the overall field in just he past few decades. Our federal tax incentive programs administered by the National Park Service, the highly effective Main Street program of the National Trust, the public-private partnerships that were formed to deal with very large and complex projects such as Fanueil Hall, Ellis Island, Union Station and Grand Central Station, our unmatched abilities in philanthropy, and our grass roots participatory process, have been noticed and are admired by other nations---including the ones from whom we learned in order set up our system.

It has been said that the milestones in the American preservation movement run in 30-year cycles. Counting from the Antiquities Act of 1908, which was created to protect Native American lands, there was in the early 1930's the boost to the field given by the experiences of Williamsburg and the work of the Historic American Building Survey. About another thirty years later there was, of course, the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, with its many positive effects that have largely shaped contemporary practice.

Could it be that the next cycle in American preservation has been defined by the challenges posed to the country's cultural landmarks after September 11th? If so, here again we are facing another very tall order, which we already appear to be solving admirably. In this respect the history of American preservation again offers great hope, we have risen to the occasion in the past, and we can certainly do it again!

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